

Safe Return Program

Help for Wandering and Lost Individuals With Alzheimer's Disease

A. What is Wandering?

- It is the most common, but life-threatening behavior of dementia patients.
- Aimless *or* purposeful motor activity that causes a social problem, such as getting lost, leaving a safe place or intruding in inappropriate places.
- Walking away from a safe environment.

B. Missing...Means Lost !

Memory impaired individuals in the earlier stages of dementia often just “walk away” from their safe environment.

- Get lost in the mall while shopping with their family.
- Make a “wrong turn” while taking a familiar route home.
- Become disoriented while driving on a familiar road.

C. Statistics on Wandering

- 60% to 70% of Dementia Individuals Wander
- An Estimated 72% Are Repeat Wanderers

Wandering is most likely to occur in the mid-stages of dementia.

D. Reasons why an individual with dementia or memory impairment wanders away:

- Restlessness due to boredom
- Lack of exercise
- Confusion about time
- Change in physical environment
- Argument with caregiver
- Fear caused by delusions, hallucinations
- Memories of past commitments

E. “Sundowning” and Wandering

- Increased restless behavior in the afternoon/early evening (this behavior also occurs in the wee hours of the morning 2:00-5:00AM).
- Inability to see in dim light.
- Restless behavior, wanting to go “home.”
- Disturbance of “biological clock.”

- Disruption of normal sleep cycle.
- Caregiver fatigue and stress at the end of the day.
- Wakes from afternoon nap and is confused.

F. Dangers of Wandering:

- Fatalities are more common where traffic tends to be heavy. (Walks right across the street without concern for on coming traffic.)•At risk from weather, dehydration / hypothermia, or those who prey on the helpless.
- Often unable to ask for help, are unaware that they need help.
- Not able to use environmental clues, cognitive mapping ability is faulty.
- Can walk or drive for hours.

Note:

- No way to accurately predict who will “walk away,” wander, or become lost. *Or* when this will happen or how it will happen.
- If they can walk or drive, they can wander and become lost.
- If they are missing, they are **LOST**.
- LOST** memory impaired individuals equals **EMERGENCY**.

G. The Safe Return Program:

Safe Return is a nationwide identification, support, and registration program that provides assistance to those who become lost locally or far away from home. Created to enable police and private citizens to identify missing memory impaired adults and help them return home quickly.

H. How Safe Return Works:

- To register a person into the program, caregivers submit important contact information to the national database. (Include photo also, see registration brochure
- Identification products, for the memory-impaired person, include an I.D. bracelet (or necklace) clothing labels, wallet I.D. card, key chain, and lapel pin.
- I.D. products have a coded number and 1-800 phone number to call.

1. Discovered Incident:

- When a memory impaired person is *Discovered* , call 1-800 number found on the I.D products and give I.D. code.
- *Safe Return* then notifies the family. (Law enforcement will be given the person’s address.)

2. Missing Incident:

- Safe Return receives the call about a missing person. The clinician working the 1-800 line, confirms with the caller that the police have been notified, a missing endangered person report completed.

- The details of the person / incident are then entered into the computerized database.
- The incident report is faxed to the local Alzheimer's Chapter, the police and the National Alzheimer's Association. A photo can be faxed to law enforcement leading the search.

3. *Resolved Incident:*

- When *Safe Return* receives notification that the missing person is found, a recovery report is faxed to the local Alzheimer's Chapter, the local law enforcement and the Alzheimer's National office.

4. *Non-Registered Missing Persons:*

- *Safe Return* attempts to assist missing persons who are not registered in the program. When such a call occurs, the clinician requests relevant details about the individual and the incident and enters this into the computerized database. If a related call comes in, this information may be accessed.
- Multilingual capabilities available to callers whose first language is not English. Over 140 languages can be translated through an interpreter.
- Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) **1-888-500-5759**.

I. *Safe Return* Benefits:

- Personalized Identification Products
- 24-hour toll-free crisis line (1-800-572-1122)
- Toll-free registration line (business hours)
- National information / photo database
- Fax alert notification system
- Local Chapter support for Caregivers/ Families
- Wandering behavior information and training available

J. *Safe Return* Numbers:

Registration Line

1-888-572-8566

Crisis Line

1-800-572-1122